

READING LITERACY AND HOME LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

Key Findings: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States

In the United States, 15-year-olds whose home language differed from the language of assessment were overrepresented at the lowest levels of achievement.

The results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 indicate that students whose home language differed from the language of the assessment did not perform as well, on average, as students who spoke the language of the assessment at home (Lemke et al., 2001)⁷. This indicator explores the performance gap between these two groups further by comparing the percentage of students in each group at high and low reading proficiency levels.

In 2000, 11 percent of 15-year-olds in the United States reported that most of the time they spoke a language other than English at home (figure 15). Compared to the United States, a lower percentage of 15-year-olds spoke a language that differed from the language of the assessment in Japan and the United Kingdom, while Italy had a higher percentage of students whose home language differed from the language of the assessment.

Fifteen-year-olds who spoke the language of the assessment at home scored higher than their peers who spoke a different lan-

guage at home in all of the G8 countries, with the exception of Japan (table 9). In Japan, differences may not have been detected due to the small sample size of non-Japanese speakers. In the United States, 15-year-olds who spoke English at home had a combined reading literacy scale score that was 76 points higher, on average, than those who spoke a different home language. Compared to the United States, a smaller achievement gap was reported between these two groups in Canada and the Russian Federation (14 and 33 point differences, respectively).

For PISA 2000, 15-year-olds from 32 countries were assessed and their scores were grouped into levels from 1–5, with level 1 or below being the lowest and level 5 being the highest.

In the United States, non-English speakers were overrepresented at level 1 or below as compared to the overall 15-year old population: non-English speakers made up 11 percent of 15-year-olds overall while they were 24 percent of those scoring at level 1 or below. A similar pattern was found in all of the other G8 countries shown with the exception of the Russian Federation.⁸

In the United States, 3 percent of students at level 5 were non-English speakers. No further analysis was conducted with level 5 data in the United States due to the presence of high standard errors.

⁷U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Outcomes of Learning: Results From the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment of 15-year-olds in Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy*, NCES 2002–115, by Mariann Lemke, Christopher Calsyn, Laura Lippman, Leslie Jocelyn, David Kastberg, Yan Yun Liu, Stephen Roey, Trevor Williams, Thea Kruger, and Ghedam Bairu. Washington, DC: 2001.

⁸Reporting standards not met for non-Japanese speakers in Japan at level 1 or below and level 5.

Definitions and Methodology

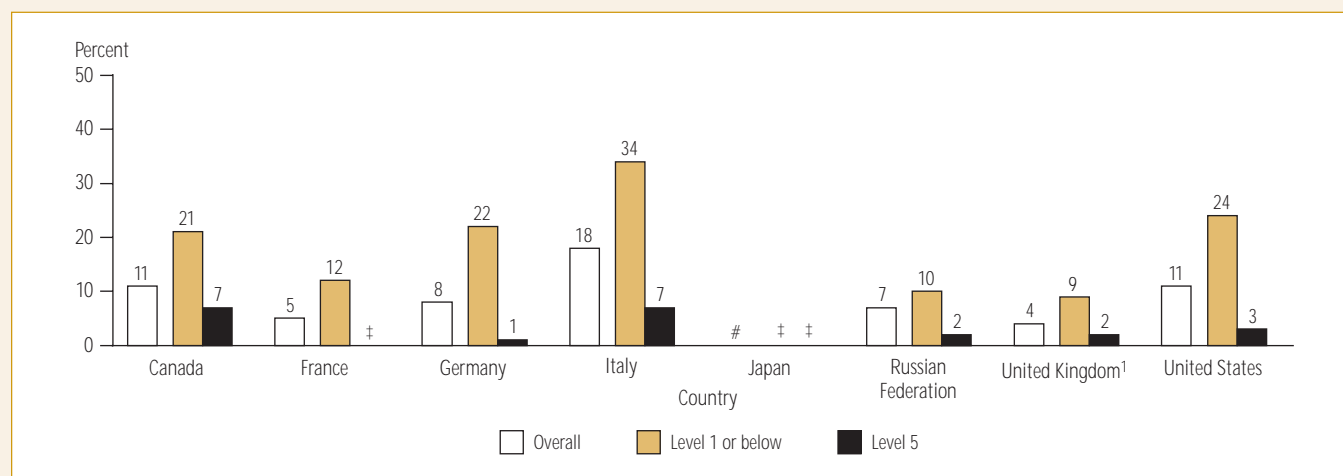
In order to better describe performance in reading literacy, PISA 2000 examined the proportion of students who could accomplish tasks at particular levels. In order to reach a particular level, a student must have been able to answer correctly a majority of test items at that level. Students were classified into six reading levels according to their scores. Students scoring below 335 were classified as below level 1, students scoring 335 to 407 were at level 1, and students scoring 626 and above were classified at

level 5. For the purpose of this report, students scoring at level 1 or below have been combined into a single proficiency level.

A population subgroup is overrepresented in a level if the percentage of the subgroup in that level is statistically higher than the percentage of the population overall in that level.

The combined reading literacy scale is made up of 3 subscales: retrieving information, interpreting texts, and reflecting on texts.

Figure 15. Percentage of 15-year-olds whose home language differs from the language of the assessment, by reading proficiency level and country: 2000



#Rounds to zero.

‡Reporting standards not met.

¹The United Kingdom includes England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Wales did not participate in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000.

NOTE: In order to reach a particular proficiency level, a student must have been able to answer correctly a majority of items at that level. Students scoring below 335 were classified as below level 1, students scoring 335 to 407 were at level 1, and students scoring 626 and above were classified at level 5. The overall percentage refers to the percentage of the total 15-year-old student population.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), PISA 2000.

Table 9. Percentage of 15-year-olds and their average scale scores, by whether home language and language of the assessment differs and country: 2000

Country	Home language differs from assessment language		Home language same as assessment language	
	Percentage	Average scale score	Percentage	Average scale score
Canada	30.5	527	69.5	541
France	5.1	446	94.9	510
Germany	7.9	386	92.1	500
Italy	18.0	448	82.0	500
Japan	0.3	484	99.7	525
Russian Federation	7.3	432	92.7	465
United Kingdom ¹	4.1	470	95.9	528
United States	10.8	438	89.2	514

¹The United Kingdom includes England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Wales did not participate in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000.

NOTE: Students were classified into reading levels according to their combined reading literacy scores on PISA 2000. In order to reach a particular level, a student must have been able to correctly answer a majority of items at that level. Students scoring below 335 were classified as below level 1, students scoring 335 to 407 were at level 1, and students scoring 626 and above were classified at level 5. The overall percentage refers to the percentage of the total 15-year-old student population.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), PISA 2000.